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Historic Pittsboro: The Mathiesen Clinic

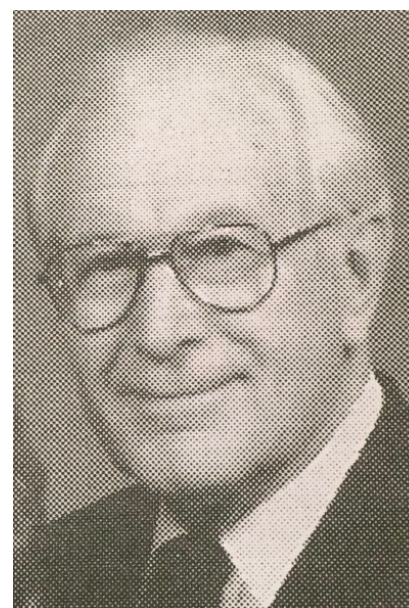
by Francis DiNardo

Pittsboro residents and visitors can choose from several excellent facilities to seek medical treatment. There are doctor's offices, an **Urgent Care** facility, the nearby **UNC Hospitals in Chapel Hill** and Siler City, or you can walk into the Mathiesen Clinic in downtown Pittsboro.

Oh wait...that's wrong...the Mathiesen Clinic closed in 1974.

That's a shame because from the time it was built in 1948 until the clinic closed, a wide variety of medical care was available to the people of Pittsboro and Chatham County.

The building, located at 45 West Street next door to **The Pittsboro Roadhouse and General Store**, was built by Dr. K. M. Mathiesen. Mathiesen arrived in Pittsboro in 1939 after completing medical school at Duke University and an internship at Watts Hospital in Durham. Before building his clinic, Dr. Mathiesen treated patients at what was his home at 315 Hillsboro Street—next to the historic Wade Barber home.

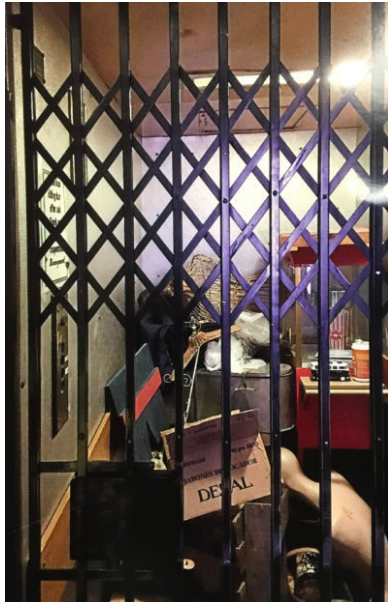


Dr. K.M. Mathiesen

In addition to being a well-loved community doctor, Mathiesen established the **7th Day Adventist Church** in Pittsboro and was once Mayor of Pittsboro. One anecdote includes Mayor Mathiesen occasionally sweeping the streets of Pittsboro with a straw broom. I have to talk to Mayor Cindy Perry about that!

Dr. Mathiesen and his staff administered stitches, vaccinations, poison ivy treatment and more. The Mathiesen Clinic had a maternity ward where many current Pittsboro residents were born. Appendectomies to tonsillectomies were performed in the surgical unit. And there was a morgue, naturally. I found myself wondering what that room might be used for today.

Several years ago, my friend Mariah Wheeler proprietor of **The Joyful Jewel**, opened her shop in the clinic building. She told me that people would occasionally stop in to



The elevator in the Mathiesen Clinic was the first one in Pittsboro.

tell her stories about how they'd either been born there, treated there, or had a loved one pass away there. "People even told me that the place was supposedly haunted, but I never saw any ghosts," she said. I love Mariah but I'm not sure I believe her about not seeing the ghosts.

Another interesting historical note about the clinic was that it contained the first indoor elevator in Pittsboro, making it the first elevator many Pittsboro residents rode in. The Mathiesen Clinic was quite modern in its day.

Dr. Mathiesen, whose wife suffered from asthma, was most well known for the asthma treatment he provided at his clinic. Mathiesen developed an asthma treatment medication after spending time in Texas with a doctor who had perfected a formula for treating asthma patients. Many people were interested in the formula, including drug company researchers and government regulators, because it was said to contain a small amount of arsenic. It's said that **Duncan Renaldo**, the actor who played The Cisco Kid on TV, once brought his asthmatic son to Pittsboro to be treated by Dr. Mathiesen.

Charles Thomas, a Pittsboro native and an active volunteer at the **Chatham County Historical Association**, recalls that his mother worked at the clinic for 20 years along with nurses Aunt Junior Alston and JoAnna Leach. Leach, also well known for running a Pittsboro boarding house for men, is still living at the age of 102 and recently attended a wedding at the handicapped accessible Courthouse.

The Mathiesen Clinic left the building when building code violations developed over time. The building has seen a variety of tenants over the years including the **Chatham County Democratic Party**, the **Chatham Arts Council**, a jewelry repair business, a bail bondsman, and a children's dressmaker. It is now called The Professional Building, is partially occupied by The Rusty Rooster antique shop. It is owned by the Marlowe family of Myrtle Beach SC. Recent water damage to the basement caused by a frozen water pipe has limited access to the interior. This prevented me from taking photos but I was pleased to have been given photos of the elevator and Dr. Mathiesen by the Chatham County Historical Association.

Thanks to Charles Thomas, Kay Judge, Mariah Wheeler and the Chatham County

Historical Association for pictures and oral histories.

Do you have stories about the Mathiesen Clinic? Were you born there? Do you know someone who was treated there? We'd appreciate hearing your stories! Please post them in the comments section below.

March 15th, 2018

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81 Comments



Sharron Womble March 15, 2018 at 8:52 pm - [Reply](#)

My husband was born there in 1958, he also had his tonsils removed there. His mom never went to the doctor until she was in labor with him. She ran a restaurant in Deep River and said she didn't have time to go. His name is William Watson Womble, Jr. (Billy)



Main Street Pittsboro March 16, 2018 at 12:15 pm - [Reply](#)

Hi Sharron. Thank you for sharing your husband's and your mother-in-law's stories with us. Do either of them recall Dr. Mathiesen or the nurses who worked there?
